

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 INRE-00 USIE-00
CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05
PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 MCT-01 SY-05 OMB-01 ACDA-07
SAJ-01 TRSE-00 OPR-02 A-01 OC-06 CCO-00 IO-13 /097 W
-----101515Z 125140 /41

O R 101316Z FEB 77

FM AMEMBASSY FREETOWN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4830

INFO AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN

AMEMBASSY CONAKRY

AMEMBASSY DAKAR

AMEMBASSY LAGOS

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MONROVIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L FREETOWN 0530

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PORS, SL

SUBJECT: FREETOWN MOVES TENTATIVELY TOWARD CALM

LONDON FOR SEITZ

REFS: A) FREETOWN 518 (NOTAL); B) STATE 29544 (NOTAL);
C) FREETOWN 380 (NOTAL)

1. FREETOWN WAS CALM DURING NIGHT FEBRUARY 9 AND MORNING
FEBRUARY 10. PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS HAVE REOPENED,
BUT ATTENDANCE ESTIMATED AT NO MORE THAN ONE-THIRD. WE
HAVE NO REPORTS OF HOW STUDENTS HAVE REACTED TO LATEST
EVENTS, AND UNDERSTAND TENSION HAS EASED SOMEWHAT, BUT
MANY PARENTS ARE WAITING UNTIL EARLY NEXT WEEK TO DECIDE
WHETHER SITUATION HAS NORMALIZED AND WHETHER TO SEND
THEIR CHILDREN BACK TO SCHOOL.

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2. UNIVERSITY NOW OFFICIALLY CLOSED AND LIKELY TO
REMAIN SO UNTIL REPAIRS CURRENTLY ACTIVELY UNDERWAY,
ESTIMATED VARIOUSLY AT \$250,000 TO \$1,500,000, ARE
COMPLETED. UNIVERSITY GOVERNING BODY MEETS FEBRUARY 11.
PARLIAMENT MEETS FEBRUARY 15.

3. IN ANSWER TO DESK'S REQUEST FOR SPECIFIC COMMENTS ON

PARAS ONE TO THREE, REFTEL B, WE SUBMIT THE FOLLOWING:

(A) AS NOTED REFTEL A, DEMONSTRATIONS HAVE TAKEN PLACE OUTSIDE OF FREETOWN. THESE APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN SPECIFICALLY DIRECTED AGAINST APC HEADQUARTERS AND GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS GENERALLY, INCLUDING PRIVATE HOUSES OF KNOWN POLITICIANS. STUDENTS AND OTHERS FREQUENTLY SEEMED WELL ORGANIZED AND DETERMINED. THERE IS SOME INDICATION THAT UPCOUNTRY UNREST MAY BE CONTINUING FEBRUARY 10.

(B) THE DIAMOND BUYING OFFICE IN KENEMA WAS CLOSED FEBRUARY 8 ON ADVICE OF GOSL AND REMAINED CLOSED FEBRUARY 9. IT IS OPEN FEBRUARY 10.

(C) NIGERIAN HIGH COMMISSION COULD ACCOUNT FOR ALL NIGERIAN STUDENTS IN COUNTRY. NONE WERE KILLED. THERE WAS ALSO A RUMOR THAT LIBERIAN STUDENT HAD BEEN KILLED DURING EARLY COUNTER-DEMONSTRATION, BUT THAT PROVED ONE OF LARGE NUMBER OF FALSE RUMORS THAT HAVE BEEN CIRCULATING AMONG GENERALLY ILL-INFORMED FREETOWN.

(D) RUMORS ABOUT NUMBER OF KILLED RANGE BETWEEN EIGHT AND FIFTY. EMBASSY DOUBTS IF ANY OF THOSE WERE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS. MOST RESULTED FROM ACTIONS WITH PARAMILITARY INTERNAL SECURITY UNIT (ISU). SOME OF MISBEHAVIOR OF ISU HAS BEEN COMMENTED ON IN PREVIOUS CABLES. CRITICAL COMMENTS OF ISU BEHAVIOR IN NEWSPAPERS HAVE BEEN NOTABLE EXCEPTION TO USUAL DEFENSE OF ALL GOSL INSTITUTIONS.

4. COMMENT: SPECIFIC COMPLAINTS OF STUDENTS AGAINST
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STEVENS AND APC GOVERNMENT ECHO CRITICISMS FELT BY MANY IN SIERRA LEONE. CURRENT ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES HAVE CONTINUED FOR PAST FEW YEARS AND NO RESOLUTION IS IN SIGHT. RECENT SPEECHES BY GOVERNOR OF BANK OF SIERRA LEONE AND VICE PRESIDENT (REFTEL C) PROVIDE LITTLE HOPE FOR POPULATION. AS A SIGN OF PUBLIC MOOD AND THIS IS ALL RELEVANT; AS A PREDICTION OF IMMEDIATE ACTION IT MAY NOT BE. IT IS WIDELY BELIEVED, AND EMBASSY SHARES THIS BELIEF, THAT CONSIDERABLE POLITICAL JOCKEYING BOTH WITHIN CURRENT LEADERSHIP, WITHIN LESS POWERFUL SEGMENTS OF APC, AND OUTSIDE THE APC, HAS BEEN WIDESPREAD DURING RECENT TENSION. MOST ACTORS, HOWEVER, APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN CIRCUMSPECT IN HEDGING THEIR BETS, AS PRESIDENT STEVENS REMAINS IN POWER AND IS LIKELY TO BE MOST VINDICTIVE WITH ANY WHOM HE FEELS HAVE NOT SHOWN ALLEGIANCE TO HIM THROUGHOUT THIS PERIOD OF TENSION. CABINET MEMBERS HAVE BEEN UNUSUALLY RELUCTANT TO MEET WITH OUTSIDERS, AND, FOR THEIR PART, OUTSIDERS HAVE BEEN MOST RELUCTANT TO MEET WITH THEM. THIS EMBASSY IS AWARE THAT GOSL

PROBABLY WILL CONDUCT SEARCH FOR EXTERNAL SCAPEGOATS
AND HAS TAKEN APPROPRIATE STEPS TO AVOID ACTS THAT MIGHT
BE MISCONSTRUED. END COMMENT.

5. FOR DESK. PLEASE KEEP IN MIND THA MR. KAIKAI, WHOM
YOU WILL BE SEEING FEBRUARY 11, IS LIKELY TO BE FROM
PUJEHUN, HOME OF FOREIGN MINISTER MINAH. KAIKAI, AND
MANY OTHERS IN PUJEHUN, PROBABLY VIEW MINAH AS TURNCOAT
OR WORSE AND WOULD BE LIKELY TO HAVE HIM HIGH ON THEIR
LIST OF TARGETS. WE WOULD APPRECIATE AN EARLY INDICATION
OF WHAT TRANSPIRES IN CONVERSATION FEBRUARY 11.

6. FOR LONDON. SIR ALBERT MARGAI CURRENTLY LIVES IN UK.
IF HIS SUPPORTERS ARE NOW CALLING ON USG, IT IS LIKELY
THAT THEY HAVE DONE LIKEWISE IN LONDON. WOULD APPRECIATE
ANY INFORMATION YOU CAN PRY LOOSE FROM FCO.
SAMUELS
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